

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Balaban & Katz Uptown Theatre

and or common Uptown Theatre

2. Location

street & number 4814 - 16 North Broadway not for publication

city, town Chicago vicinity of Congressional District 9

state Illinois code 012 county Cook code 031

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yss: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yss: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name American National Bank & Trust Co. of Chicago, Trust # 59755

street & number 33 North LaSalle Street

city, town Chicago vicinity of state Illinois 60690

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds Cook County

street & number 118 North Clark Street

city, town Chicago state Illinois 60602

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

1. Illinois Historic Structures Survey  
title 2. Chicago Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

1. October 1972  
date 2. July 1984 federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records 1. Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Old State Capitol  
2. Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks

1. Springfield  
city, town 2. Chicago Room 516 state 1. Illinois 2. Illinois 60610

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>	.....	<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

#### EXTERIOR: DESCRIPTION

The Uptown Theatre is actually a complex of four building sections comprising a large, L-shaped structure that consists of eleven roofs, three major entrance and exit lobbies, the auditorium and stage structures, the office and projection booth wing, and three marquees. The entire building is clad in buff brick and terra cotta, except for the north faces which are of common brick.

The theatre is bounded by Broadway to the east, Lawrence Avenue to the south, and Magnolia Street to the west.

The main, Broadway, facade rises one hundred and four feet to an arched and pinnacled top. This being the main entry, it is faced entirely in terra cotta, setting off the grande window which rises from the marquee.

The first floor consists of the main box office (there are two additional ones inside) of grey granite and cast bronze at the enter, flanked by three pairs of brass and plate glass doors, with bronze movie poster cases set on each side. Glass transoms run the full width over the doors and box office.

Above the transoms projects the current (1950's) marquee that spans the facade's entire sixty foot width and angles in at the sides to form a large trapezoid. It contains fluorescent lighted attraction boards on the north and south faces and spells U P T O W N in large neon letters across the front. All of this is surrounded by white chasing lights.

The grande window set above the marquee is guarded by an arcade of four columns having decorated shafts rising to a pierced entablature three-fifths of the way up the arch.

The outline of the arch around the grande window is of Spanish derivation with concave cut-out corners joined at the top by a low, gentle curve. This is used as a continuous design element throughout the theatre, and will be referred to in this text as an "Uptown arch". Wide piers of terra cotta decorated with alternating cartouches and tablets flank the window and rise to the pierced and arched parapet wall. NOTE: Light bulbs, set at one foot intervals, originally outlined the grande window, side piers, and parapet contours, and copper lanterns of various styles once crowned its spires.

This east facade fronts on the Grande Lobby structure which travels west one hundred and seven feet where it intersects the Lawrence Avenue Exit Lobby wing. That lobby extends one hundred and eighty-three feet south from the Grande Lobby's north wall and shares the Auditorium's curving east wall.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 2

The next major facade fronts on Lawrence Avenue to the south and extends west for one hundred seventy and one-half feet. The east thirty feet of this face rises sixty-seven feet to create a decorative facade for the Lawrence Avenue Exit Lobby with its five pairs of wood and plate glass doors opening onto the sidewalk. Here hung the theatre's second marquee (currently removed). Above this rise two floors of paned windows set in a decorative terra cotta arch that look out from the two floors of radio broadcast studio that were in use through the 1930's. Here stage shows were sent out over affiliate WEBH.

The west one hundred forty and one-half feet of this face (the stage back-wall) rises ninety-seven feet to the parapet wall. The first eleven feet are of a smooth rustication done in terra cotta and contains the door to the studio and the large double stage loading doors. This level is crowned by a run of light bulbs set in a single terra cotta band.

The next section rises from this level forty-two feet to a decorative terra cotta cornice of Gothic inspiration. Seven twenty-five foot tall false windows done in terra cotta decorate this wall, along with heraldic shields. The uppermost section is of two-tone buff brick set in a diaper pattern broken up by four large terra cotta medallions. Just below the parapet a terra cotta band of shells laced with festoons wraps around the stage structure, broken only by the lines of terra cotta quoins rising on each corner. Nine terra cotta pedestals placed along the parapet once supported five-foot high copper lanterns.

The stage left wall, with its five floors of dressing rooms, the right wall of the Auditorium, and the two-story office/infirmary structure all front on Magnolia Street, and make up the third major decorative facade. This runs from Lawrence Avenue north for two hundred twelve and one-half feet and carries the rustication, brick diaper pattern, and terra cotta banding and cornice around from the south facade. The majority of this face is taken up by doors and fire escapes for the dressing rooms, Auditorium, and Mezzanine. The one original cast iron canopy remains over the Grand Foyer exit doors and is also decorated with heraldic shields.

DESCRIPTION: INTERIOR

Entering the brass doors at Broadway, one passes first into a single-story ticket lobby. The walls are of decorative terra cotta with a small cylindrical shapeauxiliary box office with brass wickets to the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 3

left and right. On the south and north walls are large bronze radiator grills for heat and overhead is a heavily coffered ceiling from which now hang five 1950's brass and tin punched hole boxes.

One passes quickly through the ticket lobby and the second set of brass doors into the grande lobby. Here is a room one hundred feet deep, sixty feet wide, and rising sixty-four feet to its coffered and frescoed ceiling. The floor of buff granite with verde marble borders gently slopes up to the grande staircase of white marble and scagliola that sweeps up to the promenade around four sides of this grande space. Rising from the floor to the promenade level along the north and south are six piers clad in gilt plaster depicting the front and side views of a draped woman.

From the promenade level with its walls of silk damask panels and bronze railings rise six shield-clad columns that terminate in heavily bracketed capitals of shields and grotesque faces. The capitals support a six-foot highly decorative entablature, frieze, stonework, and backlit stained glass windows that terminate in the vast ceiling from which hang the three giant bronze chandeliers on tapestry ropes. As with all the lighting fixtures in the building, these were custom designed by the Chicago firm of Victor Pearlman & Co., are of cast bronze (oddly in the French and German Austrian rococo style) and employ a wave, crosshatch, and dripping icicle motif that was unique to this commission. These grande lobby fixtures employ bronze arms supporting groupings of candles, crystal baskets and draped with large crystals and beads. Each fixture cost \$10,000 when new and contain 212 bulbs.

Behind one as one enters, and rising thirty feet from the promenade, is the grande window that pierces the main facade.

Directly ahead, as one enters (on the west wall) at the head of the grande staircase, are three large draped arches that afford one a glimpse of the Great Hall beyond.

#### The Great Hall

The Great Hall is the second major lobby space and affords access to the loge seating, the balcony, and Lawrence Avenue upper exit lobby. The hall stands sixty feet wide, twenty-nine feet deep and is finished in walnut veneer paneling that looms thirty feet above the carpeted floor. Above the paneling, frescoed panels of paired cherubs and griffins parade in succession topped by a heavy cornice and the plaster ceiling of cross-hatch and framed panels that support two additional chandeliers of a grand but more compact scale than the first three. Along the west

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 4

wall, the frescoes give way to open arches affording a view from the fourth level balcony vomitory.

The main feature, though, of this area is a second grande staircase that opens through a single arch to the main center balcony foyer or picture gallery. As with the main grande staircase, this staircase is also guarded by a bronze railing of shields and heraldic motifs which the architects also used in the custom main floor carpeting and stained glass windows. Lapis lazuli candelabra once adorned the marble newel posts of this Great Hall staircase. Centered on the wall above the first rise of the Hall staircase, set in arched niches, were paintings of Spanish noblemen and knights.

Centered under the staircase to the west is the large arch leading to the loge seating promenade, and at the first landing of the south flight of stairs is a draped arch leading to Lawrence Avenue.

#### The Fountain Lobby

As one passes under the main grande staircase at street level, one enters a low area approximately sixty feet by sixty feet. Along the north wall to the right is the black marble and scagliola fountain with a pool lined in mosaic tile. A marble statue stood on a ledge behind the fountain while colored lights recessed overhead played on the lilies and fish that once filled the pool. Large gilt throne chairs flanked the fountain. This space is simply adorned with walls of simulated stone blocks, and a simple, coffered ceiling, all downscaled in ornamentation to offer a respite from the overpowering Grande Lobby and provide a quiet seating area before one enters the Grande Foyer.

#### Grande Foyer

Continuing west past the fountain one finds the Grande Foyer, and access to the theatre itself. This room extends along the rear wall of the auditorium (to the left) for eighty-four feet and rises three and one-half stories to a timbered and stencilled ceiling forty feet above the floor. The south wall provides four sets of wide brass French doors (into the orchestra level seating) with lace curtained windows guarded by carved gilt wood grillwork. On the north wall, seven Uptown arches mirror the aisle doors opposite. Seven large and small Uptown arches rise along the north and south walls above the aisle doors and windows and provide lookouts from the large promenade.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 5

The decor in the Grande Foyer consists of foliated borders surrounding the windows and large promenade arches that are capped by a youth seated in a half shell atop a grotesque face. Each youth is holding a festoon of flowers and shields that carries around the room. Framing the smaller overlook arches are twisted columns rising around a low balcony wall, and set against the stone block walls.

The third level is of short fluted pilasters setting off square overlooks from the balcony picture gallery on the east, south, and west walls. This Grande Foyer with its timbered ceiling tends towards Tudor styling--although cinema palaces (the Uptown included) exhibited a 1920's eclectic style that defies classification.

Three open bronze cage-like chandeliers hang from the timbered ceiling, while lantern-type cages hang from large brackets along the north and south walls. Again cast bronze railings of griffins and shields, though of a unique design, circle the loge level.

This Grande Foyer, the Fountain Lobby, and the Magnolia Exit area were all done in what is believed to be carpet designed by Rapp and Rapp. As was typical of the time, the carpet was loomed in forty-inch widths and was woven of wool. The field was done in two shades of burgundy in a William Morris pattern over which a bay leaf torus moulding crosshatch design was set. This created thirty-two inch squares set at a diagonal, and highlighted by two different four-color shields set at alternating intersections of the torus pattern. A separate forty-inch wide border pattern was designed in such a way that it can be cut at a 45° angle through a certain point which will allow the pattern to flow perfectly around corners. Today this carpet has been reproduced by Royal Wilton Mills in England for use at the only other theatre to be fitted with it originally; Shea's Buffalo Theatre, New York (National Register listing, 1977).

## Ladies' Lounge

Stepping north through three arches on the north wall of the Grande Foyer, lays a room of stone block walls, low timbered ceiling and checkered marble floor. Access is provided from this area to three Vitrolite phone booths, and the small oval French Rococo inspired Ladies' Lounge. Originally, four corner glass niches held Dresden china figurines, while the floor was softened by an oval Aubusson rug. To the left off the lounge, behind the checkered marble room, is the Ladies' Powder Room with makeup tables and mirrors and women's bathroom.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 6

Finishing this level is a suite of rooms with access off the Grande Foyer and Magnolia Lobby (to the west) and the ladies' bathroom. A nursery was provided for younger children to amuse themselves on the merry-go-round, elephant slide, and hobby horse, while clowns and tin soldiers marched around the walls, and Jack climbed the magic bean stalk. A small one-bed infirmary tended to the faint of heart.

## Lawrence Avenue Exit Lobbies

Proceeding south from the main floor Fountain Lobby, one enters a smaller one and one-half story room that gently slopes downward for sixty-five feet along the east wall of the auditorium. This Lower Lawrence area was used for exiting the 1100 persons seated on the left half of the main floor. Five pairs of French aisle doors on the west wall are mirrored by five sets of stuccoed and gilt fire doors on the east wall. Surrounding the ten sets of doors are twisted columns and termini supporting either curved pediments with urns, or shields and eagles alternately. At the second level above the aisle doors are sets of French windows behind decorative railings. These open into the loge seating area. Above the fire doors are mirrored French windows as opposite. Stone blocks make up the major wall surfaces that support a flat timbered and stenciled ceiling from which hang three downscaled chandeliers of bronze and crystal with candles, of superb proportion. Extending across the width of Lower Lawrence at the south end above the French exit doors is a four-foot wide balcony providing a view of Lower Lawrence below.

This lobby terminates on the south at a wall of wooden French doors leading to a single-story room of minimal decor. This brings one to the Outer Lawrence Lobby. The small room contains one door to the theatre basement, Dutch doors into the Lost and Found/Checkroom, double doors to the very front of the auditorium and a small staircase providing egress from the southeast corner of the loge seating area.

## Upper Lawrence Exit Lobby

Located directly above Lower Lawrence is the Upper Lawrence Exit Lobby which serves as egress from two levels of the balcony. The first level of this

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet Uptown theatre

Item number 7

Page 7

twenty-two foot tall room contains three pairs of French doors, recessed in an Uptown arch, that open to the side aisle at the second level of the balcony. Directly above these doors are balconies off which pairs of French doors with sidelights open to the third level of the balcony. On the east wall of the lobby, a staircase rises to a landing that provides egress from the third level of the balcony, while a low area under this landing leads one north to the staircase in the wood-paneled Great Hall. Comprising the decorative scheme in this area are pilasters of terminus, pointed shields, cartouches, and console brackets supporting four deeply coffered ceiling panels with large cartouches, set off by foliated beams. Lighting is provided by two of the chandeliers as in Lower Lawrence and by cornucopia-shaped torches, on the pilasters, each containing nine candles. The bronze railings here are simplified and boast pointed shields with griffins.

Proceeding south out of Upper Lawrence one comes upon the outer Lawrence Lande Lobby.

## Lawrence Grande Lobby

Patrons leaving Upper and Lower Lawrence are brought together on the three-story staircase that descends from the north wall of the Lawrence Grande Lobby. This forty-two foot by thirty foot space towers fifty-two feet to the top of its cove ceiling of segmented painted panels. At the Upper Lawrence level the stone block motif is again repeated on the walls, broken only by a large painted mural on the south wall and painted panels on the east and west walls depicting striped canopies, flowering vases and parrots in flight. The east and west panels are set behind an arcade of twisted columns and pointed arches in a mostly Byzantine/Islamic style. The lower twenty feet of the east and west walls feature five moulded panels, while the south wall provides exiting through five pairs of doors to the Outer Lawrence Storm Lobby and then to the street itself.

The Lawrence Storm Lobby is of note only in passing in that its thirty feet by fourteen foot space and fifteen foot walls are decorated in an unadorned classical French style lit by two hanging fixtures and four sconces of Empire ancestry.

Other public spaces of note are the balcony picture gallery on the fourth floor that runs east and west for one hundred fifty feet behind the rear of the auditorium and provides access to the balcony from an east and west side vomitory and a staircase at balcony center. Along the north wall are the overlooks to the Grande Foyer, access to men's and women's lounges, and staircases for ascent and descent.

The main Men's Lounge is reached by a double curving staircase under the Grande Lobby staircase which breaks at a landing of stained glass then continues



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 8

down one-half flight to a semicircular room of Gothic inspiration. A wall of stained glass backlit windows surrounds a large fireplace, while light is provided by four iron and stained glass sconces and a heavy iron chandelier. The lounge was originally furnished in heavy oak furniture. The period feel was further enhanced by two suits of armor set upon the massive hearth, straight ahead as one first views the room.

## Auditorium

Entering the auditorium at the main floor off the Grande Foyer one is at first aware of the vast expanse of seating. Immediately overhead, though, the ceilings are low and the lighting dim under the narrow shelf that is the loge seating. Passing the front edge of the Loge, with its box fronts of ornamental panels and backlit crystal starbursts, the room opens up to reveal the soffit of the balcony, eighteen feet overhead.

To the north and directly over the loge seating is one large and very wide cove lit dome flanked by two smaller oval covelit domes. Part of the beauty of this area is that, though its scale is massive, its comparatively plain ornamentation creates a feeling of great volume in a relatively small space. Further south, towards the stage, is a band of backlit plaster openwork that follows the entire contour of the soffit. The forward section of the balcony soffit angles slightly upward, enabling the patrons to have a fuller view of the stage and screen. The use here of flat panels with simple borders also keeps the sightlines unobstructed. The true magnitude of this auditorium, however, is not felt until one passes the front edge of the balcony and glimpses the sidewalls that rise sixty-eight feet and the giant domes towering one hundred two feet overhead.

The central focus of the auditorium, of course, is the seventy foot square proscenium arch framing the stage. Here the decoration takes on a different feel from that of the rest of the house in that it exhibits a rococo influence -- being a strapwork frame of panels and cartouches bordered by torus mouldings of acanthus and laurel leaves. These elements are highlighted in real gold leaf and shaded in deep crimsons and royal azures. In the proscenium arch, as with all the auditorium coves, there are amber, blue, and red circuits that can be mixed to form a myriad of colors and levels of light throughout.

Flanking the proscenium on either side are the sixty-five foot high organ grills rising from boxes over exit arches. The grills are framed in richly ornamented and gilt plasterwork while the grills themselves are of huge metal flowers and vines. Overdrapes of burgundy velvet with fringe, tassels, and a decorative valance of gold satin borders and scrollwork applique

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 7

Page 9

add richness and soften the lines. In front of each grill hangs a four foot bronze lyre-shaped Pearlman fixture with crystal starbursts (as in the Loge box fronts).

Each organ grill is surrounded by fluted pilasters that are dotted with heraldic shields. These rise to support the ribbed ceiling and covelit sounding board above the proscenium .

Commencing just past the organ grill area, and rising for five levels, is the tremendous balcony. Scaling the balcony walls above the first three levels of seating are large open Uptown arches, covelit, and draped and lighted with fixtures as the organ grills are. Running behind these arches are balcony vomitories and lookouts. Set between these arches, and flanked by fluted pilasters, are three levels of doorways that provide access to the balcony cross aisles.

At the top (fifth) level of the balcony the cross aisle continues like a horseshoe around the perimeter of the auditorium to a point just above the organ grills. This is the famous eighth floor passageway (another feature unique to the Uptown) which provides the patron with a breathtaking view of the entire auditorium and the three areas of seating; the Orchestra of 2,280 seats, the Loge with its 476 seats, and the Balcony with another 1,623 seats.

Soaring above the side and rear walls of the house are the three levels of the dome, the lowest and largest of which appears to float on a bed of light and is guarded by seven foot high seated griffins, each displaying a large tilting shield. These, in turn, support large decorative beam-like ribs that rise up and cantilever over the house, terminating in busts of laughing kings. Amid these ribs are panelled sections containing large and small backlit Spanish windows. Above the laughing kings floats one additional level done in heavy stucco, and, above that, the crowning dome, also of heavy stucco. Soft light is poured down upon the auditorium by these three different three-color coves.

The rustic palate of the auditorium, as in the rest of the theatre, is created by building up layers of glaze over a mustard brown base. This creates an antiqued patina and sense of strength and permanence. Architectural elements are shaded in washes of deep blues, reds, and creams, and are highlighted with bronze and gold leaf.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	

**Specific dates** August 18, 1925 **Builder/Architect** C.W. & Geo. Rapp

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Twelve o'clock noon, August 18, 1925, the switch was pulled as thousands of bulbs lit up the large new theatre at Broadway and Lawrence. Thus began the long and dignified career of one of the world's finest cinema palaces. "AN ACRE OF SEATS IN A MAGIC CITY -- ONE OF THE GREAT ART BUILDINGS OF THE WORLD" read the milk glass letters as twinkling lights danced about the marquee. Twelve thousand anxious people waited to enter the great portals.

The Uptown was the fulfillment of a dream for the young Russian immigrant, A.J. Balaban, and his older brother, Barney. Having been born in a west side Chicago slum, A.J. was inspired as he watched patrons drop nickels into the box of a downtown nickelodeon. Not bad, a nickel for a few minutes worth of moving pictures and a hard seat--but people seemed to love it. Thus, in 1908, a little storefront was rented at Kedzie Avenue and Roosevelt Road and the stage was set.

By 1913, A.J. and Barney, joined by Sam Katz, had been successful enough to design and open their first theatre with a balcony; the Circle of one-thousand seats.

In 1916, Balaban and Katz engaged architects C.W. and George Rapp to design their first deluxe house. The Central Park opened with twenty-four hundred seats, a mezzanine, a balcony, and, thanks to Barney's earlier experience in a cold storage plant, air conditioning. "Comfortably Cool" became a B & K selling point and trademark.

The Riviera (Broadway at Racine) followed quickly in 1918 and from then on, everything B & K touched turned to gold.

A.J.'s dream of the "big three" came to realization with the opening of the Tivoli (Chicago's first deluxe movie palace, approx. 4,000 seats) in February 1921; the Chicago, 3,800 seats, October 1921; and the Uptown, 4,500 seats, August 1925.

Between 1925 and 1931 B & K had built the Oriental (a National Register listing), and the Norshore, Paradise, Nortown, and Southtown Theatres in Chicago. Through shrewd business dealings, they had also gained controlling interest and/or ownership of every other major cinema operation in the city--at one time numbering over four hundred theatres!

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 8

Page 2

In the mid-1920's Sam Katz went to New York to help form Publix Theatres, the exhibition branch of the huge Paramount Pictures.

The B & K name remained on Chicago marquees until 1969 when the Uptown, along with the balance of the circuit, was sold to the American Broadcasting Company. In 1971, ABC sold its theatre interests to Plitt Theatre, Inc., and finally in 1983, the Uptown was sold separately to a private concern.

The Uptown is the most monumental work of the Chicago architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp. George Rapp (1874-1941) started his career as an assistant designer to Edmund Krause while working on the new Majestic Theatre and Building (now Shubert Theatre) in Chicago. It was here that George adopted the idea of "theme" lounges; rooms designed entirely differently in style than the rest of the theatre. George, along with his older brother, Cornelius Ward Rapp (d. 1927), went into practice in 1906. Their initial designs were for the earliest motion picture houses that were rapidly evolving out of the storefront nickelodeon. Their first successful theatre was the Central Park. Other notable commissions of this period include the Al Ringling in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and the Portage Park in Chicago. Throughout the 1920's Rapp and Rapp became leaders in cinema palace design -- their opulent, exotic, even excessive <sup>works</sup> meant an escape for the audiences, and this meant dollars for the theatre owners. Rapp style varied greatly, and many noteworthy theatres come to mind as being prime examples of their ingenuity and talent; among them the Tivoli (Louis XV), Oriental (Far Eastern) Norshore (Second Empire), and RKO Palace (French Palatial) in Chicago, Loew's Jersey (Spanish and French Baroque) in Jersey City, Ambassador (Eclectic Modern) in St. Louis, Paramount (Art Deco) Aurora, Warner (now Grand) (High Deco and Spanish Renaissance) in Milwaukee, and Paramount (Atmospheric) Toledo, Ohio. And this names only a few.

Rapp and Rapp ventured into non-theatrical design, and gave us the Windemere and Bismarck Hotels in Chicago; Leland Hotel, Detroit; National Press Club, Washington, D.C.; the Sigma Chi Fraternity House, Champaign, Illinois; the Paramount Building, Times Square; and their scaled-down version of New York's Rockefeller Center, the Netherland Plaza Hotel/Office/and Retail Complex, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Today the Uptown still stands as B & K's largest theatre and the largest theatre by the firm of Rapp and Rapp. Along with Radio City Music Hall, the Atlanta Fox, and the twin St. Louis and Detroit Fox Theatres, the Uptown ranks in the nation's top five in size and seating. It has the largest seating capacity in Chicago, topping the Auditorium Theatre, Arie Crown, Civic Opera House, and the Chicago Theatre. But even from the farthest seat, the Uptown attains a greater intimacy than any of these other Chicago houses (except, perhaps, for the Chicago Theatre). Due to the architects' superior design and seating layout, the Uptown has wider aisles and seats

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 8

Page 3

and more legroom than these other theatres, and also offers each patron fine acoustics and a completely unobstructed view. There truly isn't "a bad seat in the house".

Having opened fairly early (1925), the Uptown was a prototype for the super big (4,000 plus seats) deluxe movie palaces that were to follow (i.e. the large Fox houses and Radio City). In designing the Uptown, Rapp and Rapp needed to deal with the logistics of handling up to nine thousand moviegoers changing seats during a fifteen-minute intermission four or five times a day. No theatre had yet to administer to such a problem. Rapp and Rapp and B & K solved this by creating an entire wing of spacious exit lobbies off the house left side of the Orchestra, Mezzanine and Balcony -- something not done before or since. In all, the Uptown ended up with an incredible eight lobbies.

For Rapp and Rapp the Uptown was also a one-time design; the heraldic, Spanish, Tudor, and Norman styles were never repeated in other houses, as was later the practice.

The Uptown's timing was significant in that by 1925 B & K were extremely successful and had amassed a great deal of money, and Chicago audiences had, by this time, become jaded, and thus more discerning and demanding. The Uptown came along at the crest of a frivolous wave. Even though the cinema palace boom peaked between 1926 and 1929, reason, and eventually the Depression, dictated more restrained budgets on future endeavors.

In 1925 the Uptown was built for \$4 million, a figure which today ranges upwards of \$110 million. Attesting to the "no expense spared" budget are such fine features as solid cast bronze railings and radiator grills in place of the standard iron; marble baseboards and door surrounds; use of real gold leaf; the custom carpet whose heraldic shields were reproduced in the railings and stained glass; cast bronze custom lighting fixtures that were plated in 22 carat gold, and the list could go on.

Cost figures were staggering. Thirty thousand dollars was spent on the three Grande Lobby chandeliers, and \$65,000 on draperies (excluding stage drapes). Marshall Field & Co. supplied \$23,000 worth of antique and reproduction furnishings, \$56,488 worth of carpeting was installed, the auditorium seating was provided at a cost of \$50,552, and the four manual, twenty-eight rank Wurlitzer pipe organ was billed at \$52,500. This theatre was, in fact, so overfurnished that when the Michigan Theatre (Rapp and Rapp, also) opened in Detroit, some of the furniture was sent there.

In the mechanical end the Uptown also excelled; utilizing literally ten thousand light bulbs; had the largest and most sophisticated stage lighting

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

item number 8

Page 4

board in the world at opening (ten complete light changes could be made in fourteen seconds); twelve foot high letters on its roof sign, whose 925 bulbs could be seen from the Loop; a steel fire curtain weighing fifty tons with a counterweight of forty-five tons; three boilers, two two hundred ton high pressure CO<sub>2</sub> air cooling units (still operating); and a ventilating system that can dehumidify, humidify, purify, heat, cool, perfume, ozonize, and provide a complete exchange of air once every two minutes.

The Uptown was, and is, a testament to all that was the 1920's in America; an era of unbounded prosperity, youthful ideals, passion, fantasy, and escapism. Edna St. Vincent Millay epitomized the '20's by saying "My candle burns at both ends; It will not last the night; But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends -- it gives a lovely light!"

For twenty-five cents, or seventy-five cents on Saturday night, young and old, rich or poor, could tread the grounds of a world that previously was unknown; the screen could carry one off to exotic, far-away lands or cause one to swoon over larger-than-life heroes, to laugh, or to shed a tear. In the end, though, after the orchestra was silent, the curtain drawn, and the stars forgotten, one thing still remains -- the Uptown Theatre. For as Marcus Loew once said, "We sell tickets to theatres, not movies."

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Harlan, David. American Picture Palaces. 1981, New York. Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. Library of Congress #81-10344

Balaban, Carrie. Continuous Performance. 1964. New York. A.J. Balaban Foundation

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property Less than one.  
 Quadrangle name Chicago Loop, IL Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u>	<u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	B					
	Zone	Easting		Northing			Zone	Easting	Northing		
C						D					
E						F					
G						H					

Verbal boundary description and justification

Parcel 1: Lots 1, 2 and 3 (except the East 110 feet of said lots) in Block I in Rufus C. Hall's Addition to Argyle, in the South half of the Southwest quarter of Section 8, Township 40 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal

List all states and counties for properties overliapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donald K. Lampert/Leonard D. Williams

organization Theatre Historian date May 16, 1986

street & number 2257 North Kedzie Blvd. telephone (312) 252-6183

city or town Chicago state Illinois

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Michael Dennis*

title Director date 9-22-86

For NPS use only  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register date

Attest: date  
 Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 10

Page 2

Meridian, also

Parcel 2: Lot 1 (except the East 110 feet thereof) and Lot 2 (except the South 15 feet of the East 110 feet thereof) all of Lots 3, 4, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 in the Resubdivision of Block 1 (except Lots 1, 2, and 3) in Rufus C. Hall's Addition to Argyle in the South half of the Southwest quarter of Section 8, Township 40 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, also

Parcel 3: The vacated alley West of and adjoining the West line of Lots 2, 3, and 4 East of and adjoining the East line of Lots 19, 20 and 25 in the Resubdivision of Block 1 (except Lots 1, 2, and 3) in Rufus C. Hall's Addition to Argyle in the South half of the Southwest quarter of Section 8, Township 40 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois together with all the tenements and appurtenances thereunto belonging



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Uptown Theatre

Item number 9

Page 2

Landon, John W. Jesse Crawford, Poet of The Organ. 1974. Vestal,  
New York: The Vestal Press. Library of Congress #74-13654